Chapter 1

What This Book Is About

This is a book about the relationship between school and society. In it we want to invite you to think about what schools do besides teach the three Rs and the other school subjects. As you will see, schools communicate implicit as well as explicit messages to their students. To begin, we will ask you to imagine yourself in a school that is probably quite different from the ones you have attended. It will be an imaginary school, but it is not an impossible kind of school to have in a society like ours, even though we do not think any like it really exist. As you read about it in the paragraphs that follow, ask yourself what else is being taught and learned at Factory Prep besides the school subjects. You might also pause and think about your own schooling. Did its organization and practices reflect how your own society works? What did you learn in school?

Factory Prep

Imagine a school where there is never any homework. Work is only done in school, because that is where the machines are. Students punch a time card when they arrive in each classroom. They work at their studies only until the bell rings and then punch out. At the end of each week, every student receives a paycheck. Each student has a computer terminal and works at his or her own pace. There is a meter on each terminal, and the teacher can read off how much the student has accomplished during the week. This allows the school to reward students in relation to their productivity.

Courses are chosen on an elective system. Of course, the study of some subjects pays more than the study of others. If there is a shortage of scientists, courses in science offer a very high rate of pay. Because math is "harder" than English literature and mastery of math requires more "skill" than mastery of history, each hour of

school work in math pays twice that devoted to literature and one-and-one-half times that given to history.

At the end of the week, each student's time on various subjects is computed at the appropriate rate, and a check for the amount earned is issued. A portion of each high school student's pay is withheld and goes to the elementary school to be used to pay younger, inexperienced students at a cheaper rate for their work. The high school is funded by withholdings from students in postsecondary technical schools and colleges. These, in turn, are funded by business and industry, which promise jobs and commensurate pay to students who successfully complete a secondary or postsecondary education. The workers' withholdings in business and industry pay for postsecondary schools.

Student checks at Factory Prep are cashed only at the school shopping mall, where students buy the latest in electronic gadgets and clothes, play video games, or just socialize between classes or after school. When the cost of such things goes up, students tend to choose more difficult courses and work harder to keep up. But eventually their accustomed standard of leisure living declines, and they band together and demand higher rates. Student representatives bargain with the principal and faculty and usually reach an agreement. When they do not, the students strike. Because the principal and teachers are paid by the Board of Education with a percentage of the profits from the school shopping mall (and nonworking students are buying less), they have less income. These economic pressures on both sides usually produce an acceptable agreement fairly quickly.

With a little imagination, we are sure you could go on describing aspects of Factory Prep. It should be clear that besides learning subjects, these students are learning how to be workers in a society that recognizes the legitimacy of organized labor. But they are also learning other things about consumption, leisure, money, civic responsibility, and more. No doubt you could identify other things learned in this imaginary case, as well as some things besides subjects that you learned in your own schooling. In the last chapter of this book, "Cases and Disputes," we have provided a number of

realistic cases of school practices and imaginary disputes for you to use to extend your thinking about issues and ideas raised in each chapter. Throughout the text, we will suggest relevant cases and disputes for your consideration. Here we suggest a case from Chapter 8 called "Student Government," which deals with the learning of good citizenship. It presents a more realistic situation than our imaginary Factory Prep and raises some interesting issues about what is learned in school besides subjects.

An Imaginary Society

Let's try to view the relation between school and society from another perspective. Instead of the industrial, high-tech, Western society presupposed in the first example, imagine an agricultural society with common ownership of gardens and animals and the communal sharing of work and food. In this society there are no permanent or elected leaders and no paid public servants. Instead, on a rotating basis for one month each year, all adults serve as teachers in the school, judges in the court, council members, police, and in other such necessary social service capacities. Except for this public service, most adults spend their lives tending the gardens and the animals.

There is always time for celebration and festivals, however, and the people thoroughly enjoy this major diversion from their workaday world. Song, dance, and storytelling are the central activities at festival time, and while the colorful design of costumes is important, there is not much other effort at visual art in this society. Song seems to be the dominant art form of public expression, even in the work place. Weeders and planters go down the rows chanting and planting and pulling in unison. Almost every activity has a song to be sung with it. The storytelling at festival time is predominantly "historical"; that is, the stories tell of heroes and happenings in the life of the society. Standard stories are also told and retold in the daily lives of the people and serve as the bearers of their moral code and the justification of social practices. It is a

peaceful society isolated from the outside world and without warring neighbors.

Even with such a brief sketch, it should be possible to imagine what schooling might be like in this society. You might want to pause for a few moments to think about it yourself before considering our guesses on the matter. What subjects might be taught? What kinds of things might the children be asked to do? What might a typical day or month look like in a school in this society?

We speculate that in this society's schools, students might take turns once a month being a class leader responsible for such things as feeding the fish, leading the morning rituals, delivering messages, and tidying up the room. They would probably be encouraged to help each other with their lessons and to work together in the classroom. Each day, class might begin with a song and with a fable and a discussion of its "moral." The history of the group, not the history of the world, would probably be a core subject, along with some version of the "theory and principles of agriculture." Years ago, when it was an even simpler society than it is today, the traditional songs and dances of the festivals would have been taught at home; now these songs and dances, along with storytelling, are taught in school. There would probably be no lessons in the visual arts. The children would work each day in the school garden and learn the appropriate songs for each gardening activity.

We could go on, but the point should be clear. We expect schools and societies to reflect each other, not just in terms of the subjects taught, but also with respect to how the school is organized and functions. These two examples show that, in different situations, society is reflected in different ways and to different degrees. Industrialized nations do not have schools like Factory Prep, but clearly their schools do reflect some aspects of an industrialized society—such as mass production, bureaucratic organization, unionization, and impersonalized, hierarchical decision making.

Three Schools of Thought

This book is about the ways in which we try to explain and understand the relationship between school and society. In the contemporary world, there are a number of competing kinds of explanations with a number of different labels. For convenience, we have chosen to group these explanations under the three umbrella terms *functionalism, conflict theory,* and *the interpretivist approach*. These are complex and sometimes overlapping schools of thought that we will explore more fully in the chapters that follow. To help you get a feeling for the idea that similar events can be explained in different ways, we will look back at the Factory Prep example, first through the eyes of an imaginary functionalist and then through the eyes of an imaginary conflict theorist.

The *functionalist* generally sees schools as serving to socialize students to adapt to the economic, political, and social institutions of that society. In the Factory Prep case, students were learning how to be workers, consumers, taxpayers, and union members. They were also learning the traditional school subjects, of course. Learning these subjects is often called the "manifest function" of schools by functionalists. The manifest function refers to the clear and obvious intellectual purpose of schooling in society. However, the functionalist also sees schools serving a "latent" or not so visible function of producing people who share the basic economic, political, and cultural practices and norms of the society. Moreover, the functionalist sees the school as an integral, functioning part of society, vital to its continuation and survival. To convey this basic idea, functionalists often suggest that we view social institutions as analogous to parts of the body. Each functions to serve the needs and purposes of the whole. Thus a functionalist would see Factory Prep serving one of the most important institutional tasks in any society, socialization. For the functionalist, socialization means the effective molding of individuals to fit existing social practices and requirements.

A *conflict theorist* would generally view schooling as a social practice supported and utilized by those in power to maintain their dominance in the social order. In the social world of Factory Prep, there are clearly workers on the one hand and bosses and owners of

businesses and industries on the other. Students in Factory Prep are learning to be workers, not bosses. They are also learning to be consumers, who are necessary for the maintenance of the "boss" class. Without the excessive consumption of nonnecessities, extensive profits could not be realized by the owners of big business and consumer industries. Financing the schools out of taxes on wages, rather than out of profits, may give workers the sense that they are supporting their schools; but what it really does, the conflict theorist would argue, is keep profits intact while forcing workers to pay for their own training. It should be clear that the conflict with which the conflict theorist is concerned is between classes, between the rich and poor, the workers and the capitalists, the powerful and the powerless. Many conflict theorists are Marxists, and in our treatment of conflict theory, we concentrate on its Marxist form. Marxists see social institutions functioning to preserve inequitable class relations in society, and they urge us to do something about it.

Obviously, functionalism and conflict theory are two very different ways of looking at the same social world and at the relation of school to society. One sees the school as an "organ" of society, like a heart or a lung, functioning properly to keep the "body politic" going. The other sees the school as an instrument of class domination serving to reproduce the workforce and maintain class relationships. Each offers different ways to explain what social forces are operating in the school.

A third way to look at the social world and the school we have called the interpretivist approach. It is better illustrated by our imaginary agricultural society, but it can be applied to the Factory Prep example as well. The *interpretivist* sees the social world as a world made up of purposeful actors who acquire, share, and interpret a set of meanings, rules, and norms that make social interaction possible. The social forces at work are shared meanings and interpreting individuals who interact in particular social contexts. In the school of the agricultural society, the children were acquiring a sense of their society's way of life by learning its traditional songs, its fables, its history, and its norms of cooperation and public service. They were also learning how to do things in that social setting. To

understand and explain why a particular student or teacher did a particular thing in such a school, interpretivists would argue that we need to understand the way of life in that society and the ways of doing things in that school. They would also remind us that we need to learn the purposes of the individual actors and the social meanings that they share with others. How individuals interpret and understand their social situations is a central concern of the interpretivist.

Frequently interpretivists will use the analogy of a game to explain their view of the social world of meanings, rules, and purposes. One cannot play a game or engage in certain social activities without understanding what they are about and what is expected or allowed. Thus an interpretivist might look at Factory Prep and say the students have learned the rules of the "game of school," which include, among other things, how to increase or decrease their income from classroom work, how to satisfy their desire for leisure time, and what is allowed in terms of confrontation with the administration. They then decide whether it is worth the extra effort to increase their income by taking hard classes. They also decide which things to spend their money on, and, in case of a grievance, they decide whether to go on strike. They do these things as individuals with some degree of freedom, but always within the constraints of their shared understanding of the "game of school" and their willingness to play it. Some drop out, of course, refusing to play the game.

Clearly there is some overlap in our general descriptions of these three approaches to explaining the relation of school to society. This is not only because they deal with the same phenomenon of people learning to be members of a social group, but also because in reality our three categories contain much similarity as well as much variation. In the world of contemporary research and scholarship, there are functionalists who recognize conflict and deal with it functionally; there are conflict theorists who are not Marxists; and there are interpretivists who are very difficult, if not impossible, to distinguish from either conflict theorists or functionalists. Even so, we think that for the novice the three-approach scheme of this book

will do more good than harm in providing a framework in which to see how modern scholars and researchers have been thinking about the relation of school to society. We merely caution you at the outset not to take these labels too strictly. They are heuristic devices. The point of this book is to help you think about school and society by seeing how others have thought about it, not by learning how to apply one label or another to the thinkers or to school situations.

The Form of the Book

Part II will treat functionalism in depth, showing its strengths and some of its limitations. Functionalism is the dominant form of sociological explanation in our industrial-technical-scientific society. It claims for itself the status of scientific explanation. In Part III we will seek the roots of conflict theory in Marx and examine contemporary Marxist studies of schooling as the legitimation of class inequities. In Part IV we will explore interpretivist theory and qualitative research as they illuminate the relation of schooling to society and help us to see some points of similarity between the functionalist and conflict theorists` approaches.

In each part we have included summaries of a few empirical studies that have been inspired by the approach under discussion. Our objective is to show you how each approach provides a different way for trying to understand specific school practices. It is our hope that you will not simply learn the names of researchers and their approaches to the understanding of the relation between school and society. We are mainly concerned with helping you to think about that relation for yourself and to develop your own understanding of it. Toward that end, we include at the end of each chapter a section called For Further Inquiry and invite you to use it to develop your own thoughts.

How can teachers make sense of conflicting explanations of the way schools are organized today, the public controversies over schooling, and various attempts by society to change the schools? We think they need some philosophical and social perspective, and that is what this book is about. Lest you think these theories are

esoteric and nonapplicable to your everyday world, in Part V we have supplied a collection of realistic cases and disputes to stimulate your thinking and to raise ethical as well as intellectual issues. These cases and debates will illustrate the relation of theory to practice in a way that may be new to you. The theories dealt with in this book will not tell you what to do; they will help you to think seriously about what you and other educators are doing. They also will give you some perspective on current school- and society-related controversies.

Controversy over the social purpose of teaching and schooling is not new, and our schools have often been criticized from various quarters. In the early part of the twentieth century, for example, major debates took place regarding the proper role of the school in "Americanizing" the immigrants who were entering the country from Europe. At mid-century, the public schools were severely criticized for failing to prepare a sufficient number of people who would be able to take up advanced training in science and engineering. Less than a decade later, the schools came under attack as being too much concerned with subject matter and too little concerned with the growth of the individual child. They were criticized for their "rigid," "sterile" curriculum and for failing to serve adequately the cause of equal opportunity. The next decade saw the pendulum swing again, only to be reversed at the turn of the twenty-first century with the passage of the NCLB act that promised equal education for all via standards, accountability, high-stakes testing, and governmental control to reverse the perceived failure of schools to adequately teach the three Rs to all.

Over the span of writing five editions of this book, we have seen recurrent forms of these issues. Also, the contemporary concern over multicultural curricula reflects some of the issues developed earlier regarding the appropriate education for immigrants, and it also reflects the concern for using the schools to provide economically disadvantaged groups and ethnic minorities with greater opportunities. American schools are being criticized for not producing a sufficiently educated workforce that will allow us to compete successfully with other nations in our global economy.

Moreover, declining scores on standardized tests and increasing school violence, drug use, teenage pregnancy, and dropout rates have been taken as signs that the schools are failing to provide the structure and discipline that many people believe education and society require. At the same time, we are witnessing contemporary controversies in the educational research community over how best to do research that will speak to these problems and help teachers and schools to be more effective. The earlier, almost single-minded reliance on objective quantitative research is being supplemented by an increasing body of qualitative research on the subjective and local dimensions of schooling.

Whatever the particular controversy in education may be, it is often the case that insufficient attention is paid to the social context in which the issues take on importance. There is a strong tendency to overlook social, political, and cultural factors that have helped to create the situation and that also serve to create both possibilities for and limitations on what schools and teachers can do at any particular time. Without such a perspective, teachers, who have been struggling to meet previously defined needs, are often blamed for inadequately addressing a newly defined one. For students training to be teachers, the problems can be especially acute. For example, students trained during a time when academic rigor was stressed may find the emphasis shifting to concerns for greater flexibility, equality, or individual differences as they undertake their teaching careers. Without an understanding of some of the factors that generate these shifts and without the tools to appraise them, frustration, disenchantment, and alienation are likely to result. While it is unlikely that any single person, no matter how experienced, can predict with great accuracy the shifting perceptions of social need and the future demands that will be made on the school, it is possible to bring the social context of education back into focus if you know what to look for and have a framework for doing so. Part of what we attempt to do in this book is to help you develop such a framework and obtain some practice in using it to think about the problems of schools. This will require your willingness to reflect upon

and critically examine your own ideas about the role of school in society.

Schools are a human invention. They have a history. They change forms either in reaction to social forces or because of our conscious attempt to change them. Thus, participants in the schools and in society give schooling a structure; but schools also structure those who work in them and pass through them. We cannot offer a history of the school as a social institution here. However, it is important for you to keep a historical perspective in mind. It is important to recognize that schools were not always structured the way they are today. The future structure of education may depend upon educators who, we hope, have become fully aware of both the positive and negative aspects of the current structure of schools. This in turn should give professional educators a sense of their potential to shape schooling in positive ways.

To give you an overview of the three positions we will treat in the book, we have provided in Chapter 8 an imaginary debate between their proponents that you might want to read and think about before going on. It deals with their different kinds of explanations of "The Roots of School Failure."

Part II

SCHOOLING AS SOCIALIZATION AND PROGRESS

Chapter 2

The Functionalist Perspective on Schooling

Functionalism

Functionalism is a general theoretical orientation about how social events and institutions are to be viewed It is an orientation that has been especially prominent in the fields of anthropology (the study of culture) and sociology (the study of society). Its basic insight, however, is drawn from the field of biology. Functionalists note that the various systems of a biological organism serve different survival functions. In mammals, for example, the stomach, small intestine, and other organs digest food, while the heart pumps blood, thereby bringing oxygen from the lungs to different parts of the body. There are other organs that remove waste and still others that function in the reproduction process. Other species, such as fish, may have organs that are structured quite differently but serve the same survival needs. Carrying this insight from the biological to the social sphere, functionalists argue that if we want to understand a certain social practice or institution, we must consider the way in which it serves to further the survival of the social system as a whole. For example, if we want to understand the role that mass, compulsory schooling serves in contemporary society, we would be advised to explore the social needs it serves and the ways it works to meet those needs. For the functionalist, there is a similar kind of explanation for such seemingly different questions as why certain animal species kill some of their newborn, why different species of

fireflies display different coded lights, why physicians have high incomes, and why schools use standardized tests. The point is that each question is answered in terms of some basic survival need that is being served.

Just as the different parts and behaviors of an organism can be understood in terms of the function they serve in meeting the needs of survival, so, too, the functionalist argues, can the practices and the institutions of a society be explained in terms of meeting certain social survival needs. Because different environments require different responses, the way in which such needs are met may differ. However, an adequate understanding of a social institution or a practice must be grounded in an understanding of the need that it functions to serve and the way that it does so. Thus, functionalists tend to look at social institutions and practices in terms of their contribution to the adaptation and adjustment of the total social system.

Consider the selection, training, and rewarding of physicians and teachers in our society. From a functionalist point of view we would seem to need both to survive, but how might we explain the large differences in income, status, and prestige that exist between doctors and teachers? A functionalist explanation would go something like this: There are many tasks in a society that a large number of people can perform, and so a large wage is not required to encourage people to undertake these tasks. However, there are some needs in modern society that can be served only by the special talents of a relatively few people. The practice of medicine is one of these, and the development of this talent requires many years of training and education. Therefore, as encouragement for talented people to undertake this special sacrifice, society provides extra incentives. Higher income and enhanced status are society's ways of providing such incentives and of insuring that these specialized needs are met. As long as many more people have the talent to become teachers than to become doctors, then the difference in status and income will remain.

In a similar way, functionalists argue that all societies require that their members perform different tasks. Selection, socialization,

and training processes are needed to assure that jobs, even unpleasant or demanding ones, get done. Even in primitive societies, role differentiation will be found as some members hunt, others gather, and still others prepare food. In primitive societies, however, role differentiation is not intense, and one member's contribution to the society can often be seen by all other members. Because contributions made by different people performing different roles are visible to all and everyone participates in the tribal rituals, the group develops a shared value system and cognitive orientation; thus their sense of group solidarity is maintained.

For the functionalists, *role differentiation* and *social solidarity* are the two primary requirements of social life. They must be present in primitive and modern societies alike. In primitive societies these requirements can be met through the informal education that occurs within the family and the community. In highly complex, modern societies, however, where roles change from one generation to the next, a more formal structure is required to assure that the education of the young takes place and that role differentiation and group solidarity are achieved. A system of universal, compulsory, public education is established to accomplish this. Compulsory education is also able to assure that older, dysfunctional habits, attitudes, and loyalties are replaced by newer, more functional ones. Compulsory education facilitates the development of new skills that the continuous expansion of technology requires. Just think, for example, of the changes being wrought in our society and our schools by the advent of computers.

From the functionalist point of view, universal compulsory education is closely related to the requirements of industrial society. Schools perform in a formal way those basic tasks that simpler societies are able to perform informally through the ongoing activity of the family, the community, or the tribe. For example, in most traditional societies, children learn to work by watching their parents and other adults working and by participating in that work at increasing levels of responsibility. In modern societies, children have little opportunity to watch their parents work, and schools must now teach many of the requisite skills and attitudes.

This brings us to another feature that is often associated with functionalism. This feature is a stage theory that is used to explain the "development" from simple, traditional social structures to more complex, modern ones. Functionalists who accept a stage theory believe that the movement from traditional to modern society can be explained in terms of different kinds of functional integration. Wilbert Moore, in his summary of functionalism, describes one widely accepted model as follows:

> Stage one is the functionally integrated and therefore relatively static traditional society; stage two comprises the transitional process of structural alteration in the direction of modernity; stage three is the functionally integrated fully … modernized society.[1]

This extension of functionalism has sparked considerable debate both inside and outside of the functionalist camp. Some argue that a stage theory is too ambitious. There is not just one pattern of development that holds for all societies, nor possibly should all societies become "modernized." Others note that the image presented of modern society as essentially democratic and free justifies morally questionable attempts to change the nature of traditional societies. Nevertheless, while stage theory has not been fully accepted by all functionalists, it has been an important feature of the work of some of its major advocates.[2] Moreover, it has had significant influence on matters of educational policy in Third World countries.

Those who accept a stage theory of development are often quite explicit in proclaiming the benefits of modern societies over traditional ones. In their view modern societies are able to satisfy more needs for more people, and compulsory schooling is seen as an essential part of this process. School provides the role differentiation and solidarity that in most traditional societies are developed through other means. In traditional societies individuals have little chance to advance beyond the station into which they were born. Training for positions of leadership is only available to those with the appropriate birthright. In contemporary industrial

society schools replace parental status as the principal selection mechanism. Moreover, they provide the training appropriate for participation in the social order at a certain level. Many functionalists argue that modern schools perform these tasks in a much more efficient, fair, and humane way than they have been performed in societies without a system of universal, compulsory education.

Many functionalists believe that schools are the essential transformation mechanism between life in the family and life as an adult in a modern, urban, industrial society. One of the most succinct descriptions of this functionalist view of schooling is provided by Robert Dreeben in *On What Is Learned in School.*[3] Dreeben argues that schoolchildren learn to function according to the norms that are appropriate to economic and political life in the modern world. Norms are standards used to govern one's conduct in appropriate situations. Dreeben observes that such learning not only derives from the subject matter that is explicitly taught in the school but also happens as children begin to function according to the organizational patterns that are a fundamental part of school life. In this latter case, it is the *ways* things are taught, rather than *what* is taught, that enable such norms to be learned. According to Dreeben, four key norms are learned in school as a youngster passes from the lower to the higher grades and from membership in the family to membership in the society. He calls these norms "independence," "achievement," "universalism," and "specificity."[4] He believes that these norms are essential to being an effectively functioning member of a modern, industrial, democratic society. He also believes that they can only be taught effectively and on a large scale in schools.

The norm of *independence* refers to the learning that occurs when children come to take responsibility for their own action and to acknowledge that others have a right to hold them accountable for such action. Schoolchildren learn this norm through such things as sanctions against cheating and plagiarism. These sanctions prepare students for adult life and for the kind of occupations that will require them to take on individual responsibility. The adoption of this norm teaches children to be personally accountable for their own

performance. Learning the norm of *achievement* is learning that one will be judged by one's performance and not, for example, by one's effort or good intentions. Students also learn to judge their own performance against that of others. Here some students must learn to cope with failure and to acknowledge the greater skills of others in certain areas of performance.

The norms of *universalism* and *specificity* refer to the treatment of a person in terms of some standardized basis of comparison. For example, for certain purposes, all first graders (specificity) are considered appropriate to compare with one another (a universal group). These norms are reflected in the schools in many different ways. For example, when a child's request for an excuse for a late assignment is met with the response, "If I make an exception for you, I will have to make one for everyone else," the norm of universalism is being expressed. If the teacher says, "John is a member of the basketball team and so is excused from tonight's assignment because of the game," the norm of specificity is being invoked.

Universalism, according to Dreeben, refers to the uniform treatment of individuals as members of one or more specific categories, for example, team members, bus students, or graduating seniors. The important point about learning to accept the norm of universalism is that, in doing so, one becomes willing in certain circumstances to put aside one's individuality and be treated as a member of a group. Universalism requires the same treatment for all. For instance, all team members may be required to attend all practice sessions. *Specificity* allows for exceptions to be made. The coach may excuse a team member from practice because the player observes a religious holiday not observed by others on the team. *Particularism* makes illegitimate exceptions. If the coach gives special advantage to one youngster because he happens to be the child of a fellow teacher, we have an instance of particularism. The norm of specificity is related to that of universalism, It speaks to our obligation to treat people similarly only on the basis of the specific categories that are relevant to the task at hand. Students learn that exceptions can be made only if they are made on legitimate

grounds. For some activities the number of relevant categories for specificity may be quite large. For example, the elementary school teacher may find age, ability, maturity, and family stability to be relevant. The high school teacher may only consider performance in one subject to be relevant.

The four norms may or may not be taught in the family as well as in the school. When such norms are taught in the family, however, there is a difference. Unlike the family, Dreeben observes, the school provides youngsters with a group of peers against whose performances their own individual performance can be judged. In school youngsters are grouped together according to age, and this provides them with a visible point against which to compare their own independence and achievement. Comparison with others as peers is also basic to learning the norms of universalism and specificity, and many such opportunities present themselves in school.

As a functionalist, Dreeben believes that the four norms of independence, achievement, universalism, and specificity are precisely those that are required to act as a worker and a citizen in contemporary industrial society. By learning to accept the four norms that are transmitted through participation in school life, students develop the "psychological capacities that enable them to participate in the major institutional areas of society, to occupy the component social positions of these areas, and to cope with the demands and exploit the opportunities that these positions characteristically present."[5]

Equality of Educational Opportunity

You can see the influence of these norms, which you may have learned in school, by observing your own reaction to the following fictional advertisement: "Wanted, white Christian male, Ivy League graduate, for managerial work in a major marketing firm. Excellent opportunities for advancement."

There was a time when advertisements similar to this were not unusual, and many ethnic groups have stories about such overt

discrimination. Today such an advertisement would clearly demand attention. It violates many people's sense of fairness (as well as the laws against discrimination) because it stipulates qualifications that seem to be irrelevant for successful performance in the position. Dreeben and other functionalists believe that the unfavorable reaction that would likely greet an advertisement of this kind can be attributed to the role that schools have played in developing the psychological attitudes that a commitment to the norms of universalism and achievement entails. We have become used to expecting that rewards will be granted on the basis of achievement and merit. Thus, the norms developed in school are related to an important ethical principle that is associated with contemporary industrial societies—the principle of equal opportunity.

The idea of equal opportunity means that individuals are to be chosen for certain roles and rewarded on the basis of *achieved*, rather than *ascribed*, characteristics. An ascribed characteristic is one that belongs to a person by virtue of his or her birth and background. Wherever political office, income, or rights are determined on the basis of family background alone, then we have a situation in which rewards are distributed according to ascribed qualities. When factors that are irrelevant to the task at hand are discounted, and a person is rewarded according to performance or to qualities that signal a promise for high-level performance, then we have a situation in which rewards are distributed according to achieved qualities. In most instances people will identify social-class background, race, religion, and sex as irrelevant, ascribed characteristics, and they will identify talent, ability, and motivation as relevant, achieved ones.

Functionalists give three reasons for the movement from ascribed to achieved rewards in modern societies. First, it is thought that the ever-expanding skills required by industrial society often render obsolete the skills passed on by the family or the local community. Thus, to reward qualities that have been passed on from one generation to the next may well be to retard the development of the new knowledge and skills required to meet modern needs. Second, the expanding need for new skills requires that opportunities be

opened to talented people from groups that have traditionally been denied them. Third, political stability requires that those who have not been rewarded, as well as those who have, believe that they competed under a fair system of rules. Thus, the ideal of equal opportunity is thought to be not only ethically sound but also consistent with the requirements of stability in modern society.

It should be recalled that the transition from the personal life of the family to modern bureaucratic life described by the functionalists does not necessarily take place on the conscious level. If we ask teachers what they are doing at any particular moment, they are likely to answer in very specific ways, with such typical responses as "I am teaching spelling" or "I am working with the children on fractions." Seldom will teachers respond with comments like "I am teaching my students to judge themselves and others according to relevant categories" or "I am teaching them how to function in bureaucracies." Yet, according to the functionalists, this is precisely what is being accomplished. The interesting question to ask and answer is "How?"

The idea of the "hidden curriculum" has been one of the concepts that has been used to explain the school's role in making possible the transition from life in the family to a life of work and citizenship. The hidden curriculum refers to the organizational features and routines of school life that provide the structure needed to develop the psychological dispositions appropriate for work and citizenship in industrial society. The waiting in line, the vying for the teacher's attention, the sanctions against "cheating," the scheduling of activities according to the demands of the clock, all contribute to the development of behavior required by modern institutions. The student learns to channel and control impulses according to the institutionally approved patterns of behavior.[6]

Educational Reform: Three Cases

Functionalism has served as more than just a social science theory used to understand the role that schools and other institutions play in society. It has also served as a theoretical guide for people

interested in the reform and improvement of modern society. In other words, it has served as both the scientific foundation and the justification for many different kinds of educational reform. The use of functionalism by educational reformers is quite understandable. Once it is recognized that modern schooling is required to meet the needs of contemporary society, then it is quite a natural step to try to identify the precise nature of those needs and to mold educational policy to try to meet them more effectively. Much of educational reform has been built on the functionalist view that schools serve to help people adapt to the changing life of modern society. When adaptation becomes a problem and dysfunction results, it is quite reasonable for some people to think of schooling as a way to correct it. We can illustrate the connection between functionalism and educational reform by considering some imaginary cases.

First, imagine that you are not only a functionalist but also the head of state of a nation that just gained independence from a colonial power. The state you govern contains two tribes that are relatively equal in size and power. However, these major tribal groups have had a history of antagonism toward one another, and it was only resistance to the external colonial power that brought them together as a unified force. As leader of the new country, you are aware that within twenty years the northern tribal group will suffer a drought because the neighboring country is damming and diverting the river that flows first through its territory. You also know that only the food resources of the southern tribe will enable the north to avoid catastrophe. If the catastrophe is avoided, the northern tribal province should flourish and contribute much to the wealth of the entire nation. The difficulty that must be faced, however, is that present tribal loyalties would never allow the needed transfer of resources to take place. Without this transfer, the catastrophe cannot be avoided. Given this situation, it is decided that the only hope is to begin to shift personal loyalty from the tribal group to the nation. In order to do this, you begin to develop a public system of education and to offer special incentives for attendance. You mandate that the curriculum of the school will stress national purposes rather than tribal ones, and the most successful students will be offered the

opportunity to attend the national, multitribal university and to take up leadership positions in the government. What else might you do?

Here is a second situation. Again imagine that you are a governmental leader in a society where the largest part of the population is in the agricultural sector. For the last three decades, however, there has been a decided movement toward urban areas. At the same time that factory production is becoming mechanized, so, too, is agricultural production. Because factory work is expanding rapidly, there is a need for more urban workers. On the farm, because of mechanization, fewer people are needed to produce more and more basic food products and fiber. However, as this urban migration is occurring, it is noticed that many of the basic work and sanitation habits that were appropriate for the farm are continuing in the city, even though they are no longer functional. For many of the new city dwellers, for example, money management is a problem. On the farm, basic needs could be more or less met without depending upon a long train of suppliers. In the city, this is not the case. There it is necessary to have the cash required to buy essential goods, and this means that the newcomer has to find a way both to make a wage and to manage it once it is made. In addition, the entire family structure is changing, and machines are reducing the need for child labor. Nevertheless, many children still work in factories. For those who do not, there are no relatives available to provide the attention and care they require while their parents work in factories. Many people have begun to feel that, without proper guidance, life in the city is becoming unhealthy for many children and that some new structure is needed for them. Yet as long as child labor is available, it provides a source of cheap workers for many businesses. Not to hire children is to operate at a competitive disadvantage. Schools are available, but many children do not attend them for a variety of reasons. The solution that you propose is to make school attendance compulsory into adolescence and to prohibit child labor. In this way no single business will be placed at an unfair advantage, and a substitute institution will take the place of the dwindling extended family. What other educational reforms might

you propose to deal with the social problems that now exist in this society?

Imagine a third situation: A compulsory system of education has been operating in your country for a number of years, a reasonably high rate of literacy has been achieved, and for most groups the transition from rural to urban life has been accomplished. However, new technological advances have been developing that will require more scientists, engineers, and managers than are being produced by the present system. Over the years universities have remained the domain of the well-to-do, providing the children of this group with the polish needed to maintain their family position. However, if the new needs are not met, foreign competition threatens to overtake your nation's external markets and even to penetrate the home market. Your educational advisers have assured you that ample talent to fill the required need can be found among the general population. Unfortunately, few means exist to identify such talent, and the resources of higher education are not sufficient to train it. You respond by calling a meeting of leading educators, in which it is resolved to develop a fair national system of testing that will be used to identify talented members from all classes in the society who will be able to benefit from a university education. In addition, university educators promise to reform their curriculum by placing a new emphasis on science, mathematics, engineering, and business and by introducing graduate research programs that will assure a steady growth of knowledge in these areas. You agree to fund these proposals.

The three situations presented above are hypothetical; they do not attempt to describe the experience of any single country. They do, however, represent a functionalist approach to thinking about the establishment, maintenance, and change of a national system of compulsory education. In the situations above, at least three functions are represented. In the first instance, the school system will serve to establish a single, national identity and will thereby be used to overcome the strife created by conflicting tribal loyalties. In other words, it is serving the function of social integration. In the second instance, schooling is made compulsory in order to develop

new habits and attitudes that changing times require. Here it is serving what may be called the function of social re-integration. In the third situation, the educational system will be fine tuned, or rationalized, to provide the higher-level skills demanded by international competition. In other words, it will be used to identify talent from all segments of society and to provide the training that higher-level skills demand. In this case, the school is serving the function of role differentiation. Before going on, you might want to consider the dispute over "National Reports on Education" in Chapter 8.

Assimilation. Political Socialization, and Modernization

Many reformers, arguing along functionalist lines, view the school as society's primary instrument for meeting the demands of our modern political, social, and economic life. Specifically, they argue that schools must teach students to act according to democratic principles, to tolerate diversity, and to work in a specialized, highly technical economy. Add to these three political, social, and economic goals that a person should expect to be rewarded according to merit, and you have the basic elements required for developing and maintaining a modern, functional, meritocratic society. Three basic processes are related to this perception of the social function of the school. These are the school's role in cultural assimilation, political socialization, and modernization. The first two processes, assimilation and political socialization, are closely aligned to the functionalists' views on social integration and solidarity; the third process, modernization, is aligned to their views on role differentiation and development theory.

Assimilation is a cultural concept. It refers to the process whereby one group, usually a subordinate one, becomes indistinguishable from another group, usually a dominant one. As one group takes on the dress, speech patterns, tastes, attitudes, and economic status of the dominant group, the process of assimilation occurs. *Political socialization* is primarily a political concept. It is also, secondarily, a psychological one. In the context of modern society it

refers to the widening of a person's political loyalty beyond the local group to the nation as a whole. It also refers to the process whereby a person comes to accept the decision-making process of modern democratic forms of government. *Modernization* is both an economic and a social concept. It refers to the development of the meritocratic, bureaucratic, and individualistic form of life that is associated with modern society and is viewed as a prerequisite for technological and economic development.

These three processes overlap. For example, assimilation involves, among other things, a change in the wants of the members of the newer groups. Modernization presupposes just such a change. After all, a meritocracy depends upon people wanting what it offers as rewards. Similarly, political socialization may be seen as a more specific case of assimilation. Nevertheless, while these processes overlap, they can be treated separately. In this section we examine the relationship between educational reform and the twin processes of assimilation and political socialization first and then look at educational reform and modernization.

As immigration from non-English-speaking areas increased in the early part of the twentieth century, reformers in the United States looked to the schools as a major instrument for assimilating new groups into what was called "the American way of life." People differed about the form that assimilation should take, however. Some believed that immigration should be restricted to those groups from Northern and Western Europe whose values were felt to be already in accord with the ideas of American culture. Others believed that immigration could be opened to groups from other countries if the schools proved able to "wash out" native cultural patterns and impose standards on the newcomers that were in keeping with "the American way of life." Still other reformers argued that each new culture had its own unique contribution to make to American society and that cultural identity should be nurtured in the schools. These people argued that the schools' responsibility should be to develop in each student a commitment to the ideal of a pluralistic society. Even though there were such different opinions about the form that social

integration should take, there was agreement that political and technological concerns required a new pattern of assimilation.

Many educational reformers have looked to the schools to help assimilate new groups into the ongoing culture and to develop a common allegiance to democratic principles. There continue to be many differences among educators, as well as among political figures and within the general public, as to the best way to carry out this task. Some believe that schools should carry on a direct assault against political doctrines that are seen as alien to the values they associate with American democracy. Thus, during the Cold War some states passed laws mandating that schools teach courses about "the evils of communism." Others have argued that the schools should reflect in their own structures and curricula the decision-making process they associate with democratic forms of life. The encouragement of student government has been one response to this view. Others have proposed that students should be able to participate more fully in the planning and development of their own educational programs. Despite these differences, there has been agreement among many, both within education and outside it, that schools have an important role to play in the political socialization of the young.

Political socialization has a special importance in schooling in larger industrial societies, where much of the information that goes into the making of a political decision is not available to the public. When a government decides to raise taxes, go to war, or integrate a school, for instance, it requires a general acceptance by its citizenry of a number of things. First, it requires that the public believes that the government is acting as a representative of the general population. Second, it requires that the public believes that the government is acting in good faith. And third, it requires that each individual believes that the government has the support and the power to enforce its will. The first of these requirements means that students who will become citizens must develop faith in the process through which political representatives are chosen and their laws are made. The second requires that they have at least minimal faith in government officials and agencies. The third requires that students

believe that most of the other people in the society have the kind of faith mentioned in the first two points above and therefore are in fact willing to act upon their government's orders. "The Geography Lesson" in Chapter 8 raises issues about the relevance of politics to the classroom and what constitutes enlightened citizenship.

The role of the school in modernization is closely tied to both the cultural and the political functions of schooling. It refers to the development of a bureaucratic, individualized form of life in which the production (and to some extent the consumption) process is rationalized to meet the requirements of efficiency. When the term *modernization* is used by contemporary scholars and reformers, it is usually meant to indicate the process whereby a preindustrial society develops its agriculture, industry, and technology in a way that parallels the development that took place in Western Europe and the United States during and after the Industrial Revolution. Modernization theorists believe that economic growth in both agriculture and manufacturing depends upon the development of a market economy with a certain degree of centralized planning, the introduction of a meritocratic reward structure, and the development of a national bureaucracy.

Modernization theory has also emphasized the importance of the development of "human capital." This emphasis is of special significance to educators. The idea is that if the movement toward industrialization is to be effective, then there must be not only investment in machinery and capital equipment, there must also be a similar investment in the development of human skills. In other words, education has an economic value for the society at large, and a large part of the process of modernization involves identifying and training new talent so that it is able to make effective use of innovative technologies.[7]

The development of human capital is perceived as important in both technologically developed societies and in technologically developing ones. In developed societies it is perceived as a way to maintain the social wealth that past generations have established, while accelerating economic growth by bringing talented members

from minority populations into the production process. Indeed, in some instances human capital theorists have argued that the greatest value may be reaped by investing more educational resources in groups that have previously been left behind in the educational process. In some circumstances the value added to the total wealth of a society may be increased more by investing additional resources in the education of an underachieving minority than in the already well-educated majority. In these circumstances human capital theory has provided strong arguments for opening educational opportunities to underrepresented minorities.

For technologically developing countries, the development of human capital is seen as essential in meeting the various "manpower" needs of the society at different occupational levels. Depending on the circumstances, there are a number of different kinds of choices that might be rational. For example, given a limited amount of resources, "manpower" planners might decide to allocate training funds for only a few positions requiring university-level education and concentrate the largest amount of educational resources for developing primary school education on a wider scale. In some situations it might be most cost-effective to train the nation's professional and technical elite in university facilities outside of the country, while using most of the educational resources within the country to build primary and secondary schools. Whatever the specific arrangement may be, the basic idea here is that the development of the educational system should be guided by and be functionally related to the overall requirements of the workforce.

In this chapter, we have described a functionalist approach to understanding and dealing with the relation of school to society. Functionalists view society as analogous to a biological organism whose various parts have evolved in an integrated way to meet needs and enhance the capacity for survival. From this analogy, the functionalist argues that schools serve to meet some of the essential needs of modern society. There is an important difference between social and biological functionalism, however. Organisms cannot readily change their organs nor alter their imprinted behaviors. Societies and schools can and do change, sometimes rapidly and

radically. Some changes are brought about by the force of events, but others are consciously intended. Functionalism offers a way of thinking about the structuring, organizing, and reforming of schools in order to serve the perceived needs and purposes of society. But when this is done, some people get uncomfortable with the idea of manipulating people to achieve social ends. Before we go on to introduce the conflict theorists, who see schooling as a form of control by the classes in power, we will review in the next chapter some of the criticisms and problems to be found within functionalism. At this point, however, you might want to consider "Resource Allocation" in Chapter 8, a case that brings into sharper focus ideas dealt with in this chapter and raises difficult questions about social needs and social justice.

For Further Inquiry

For a fuller classical treatment of functionalism, see Robert K. Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure, Revised Edition* (New York: Free Press, 1967), and Talcott Parsons, *The Social System* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1951). To get a historical perspective, see T. B. Bottommore and L. R. Nisbet, eds., *A History of Sociological Analysis* (New York: Basic Books, 1978).